

# CPS Reform Watch

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## Special points of interest:

- May is Foster Care Awareness Month! The Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents is teaming up with child welfare officials, advocates, licensing agencies and other foster parents to plan and promote events to recognize foster parents' efforts on behalf of abused and neglected children. The events also will highlight the need for more foster families in Arizona. For more information, please visit [www.azafap.org](http://www.azafap.org).

## Joining Forces to Better Serve Families

Child Protective Specialists Elaine Wilder and Rosa Nuñez took the steps necessary to protect abused and neglected children. But, when families needed help with services like utilities, employment and housing, they would have to refer them for those services with little opportunity to follow up to ensure the family received the assistance they needed.

Family Assistance Eligibility Interviewer Becky Bustamante and JOBS Service Counselor Dawn Carrig helped many families meet their basic needs for food stamps, cash assistance and job training, but they had little recourse if they felt there were other, unmet needs that threatened the family's stability.

Now, these four employees are able to combine their concern, expertise and commitment to help Arizona's most at-risk families help themselves. Wilder, Nuñez, Bustamante and Carrig are all members of Family Connections, teams of staff members from various DES programs who work together with families and communities to create more



In Family Connections, DES staff work with clients and communities to improve outcomes for kids!

stable, nurturing environments for children.

Case information, decision-making and responsibility are shared, not just among the staff, but among case participants like parents, children, faith communities, neighborhood groups and treatment or service providers. The goal is to focus on family and community strengths and resources to ensure child safety and well-being. The plan changes as families meet goals and set new ones.

The effort kicked off this month with two teams – one in Maricopa County and one in Pima County. The Department plans to expand that number

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## Feds Laud CPS' Improvement Efforts

Arizona has been complimented by federal child welfare officials for its efforts to improve outcomes of the Child Protective Services system.

On December 23, 2004, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families congratulated the Arizona Department of Economic Security on

completion of its Program Improvement Plan (PIP) under the Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR).

"Arizona is among the first states in the nation that have been determined to have successfully completed all provisions of its PIP," DHHS-ACF Regional Administrator Sharon Fujii said

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## Youth Voices Heard — Input Now Part of Staff Training, Other Reforms

When working on strategies to improve the services provided by the child welfare system, some of the best insight and ideas come from the very children and families we serve. That's why the Governor last year expanded the state's Youth Advisory Board and will meet with them on a semi-annual basis.

Administrators from the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) attend, but the youth members run the meetings. They use this time to bring up critical issues, such as: greater involvement in decisions that affect their lives, increased visitation with their siblings who are placed apart from them; improving group home life and, the need to increase services so that they can successfully transition to adult life.

Their comments and suggestions are making a difference!

A Youth Panel has been added to the Core



Youth voices are heard in reform efforts through the Governor's Youth Advisory Board and youth participation on reform sub-committees.

Training that all new Child Protective Services case managers receive. Several youth will come to the classroom to give new workers insight into how to work more effectively with this special group of kids in care. The session includes an exercise to help case-managers-in-training experience the system from the youths' perspective, followed by an interactive discussion. The Division is exploring ways to share this information with existing case managers and supervisors.

In February, a counselor from the DES Division of Employment and Rehabilitative Services (DERS) was stationed at the Maricopa County offices of the Youth Intervention Program to assist youth in group homes with vocational training and employment

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## Arizona One of First States In Nation To Complete Improvement Plan

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in her letter. "The completion of this plan is a milestone for both Arizona and ACF. It represents three years of dedication and commitment from staff at every level."

"ACF commends the state for its commitment and leadership in improving outcomes for children and families."

The CFSR is the most comprehensive federal review of child welfare outcomes. In September 2001, Arizona's child welfare system did not achieve the necessary outcomes in seven areas. Since then, the state's Division of Children, Youth and Families has put in place the changes necessary to improve and has been making progress in areas like:

- Ensuring that children have permanency and stability;
- Preserving the continuity of family relationships and connections for abused and neglected children;
- Enhancing families' capacity to provide for their children's needs;
- Ensuring that abused and neglected children receive services to meet their educational needs;

- Ensuring that abused and neglected children receive appropriate services to meet their physical and mental health needs;
- Ensuring the quality and consistency of caseworker training; and,
- Ensuring that Arizona has a system to evaluate the quality of services and improvements.

In addition to improving outcomes for the children and families served by the state's child welfare system, successful completion of the PIP means that the state will avoid \$885,269 in penalties from the federal government.

DES Director David Berns, in receiving Fujii's letter, complimented the collaborative and outcomes-focused approach of the staff who participated in the CFSR process, particularly Katherine Guffey and Mark Schwartz who coordinated and wrote the state's PIP.

"This is a huge step forward in our efforts to keep children safe and strengthen their families," Berns said. "It demonstrates the progress that can be achieved when we partner with consumers, advocates and communities to make life better for the most vulnerable among us."

## Staff Say Families More Cooperative, Successful When Part of the Team

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to ten teams by the end of the year. Staff members said the families' response has been especially rewarding.

"When you go to a doctor and are referred to specialists for tests, all those people work together to make you better," Nuñez said. "We're no different, we're specialists working with the family to make them better."

Wilder said families are surprised when they see how many people are working to support them.

"The families are amazed that we call and ask them to come in, then take so much time to listen and work with them," Wilder said. "In CPS, many families stay away from us; here, they feel like they are in control, but they know we are here to help them."

Bustamante said the most profound change for her is how personally connected she feels to the families she helps support.

"Before, it was them and us," she said.

"Families didn't feel that they were part of the solution. Now, we're all partners working to help them help themselves into a better place."

Carrig said the teams represent a whole new way of doing business.

"It's a challenge; you have to listen more and be open-minded," she said. "But, it's also easier because the family feels like you are there to help."

All four women said being part of Family Connections is more rewarding than their past jobs, and that they know their former colleagues are watching.

Keith Smith, who supervises the work of the unit, summed it up.

"There's a lot of finger-crossing and well-wishing going on," he said. "There's a sense in all the programs that this was the piece that was missing and that by working together, we can be a sort of primary prevention for the rest of the agency."

## Faith Groups to Support, Recruit Foster Families

When members of St. Thomas More Parish in Glendale decided to participate in a back-to-school campaign to collect backpacks and other supplies for children in Maricopa County's group homes, they had no idea that it was the beginning of a church-wide effort to support foster families and the children they serve.

As they collected donations from parishioners, they asked time and again whether any more could be done to support foster children. The church's answer was their Foster Care Support Ministry. This ministry has recently begun its outreach activities, which focus on volunteer opportunities (such as mentoring or becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate), creating Life Books (a collection of personal material for a foster child to carry with them), and of course, becoming a foster parent.

Although they didn't know it at the time, the St. Thomas More Parish was an example of the latest effort to recruit and support foster families – the faith community. Formed as an off-shoot of a subcommittee working on foster home recruitment and retention, Faith In Kids is working to formalize outreach, recruitment, support and service activities through faith-based organizations. The group is working on obtaining its

non-profit status, establishing its business plan and recruiting its board of directors. Also high on the list: planning a state wide conference of faith-based organizations interested in reaching out to their community's abused and neglected children and their families – foster and biological.

For more information on Faith in Kids, please contact the Rev. Stephanie Withrow at 480-223-8523 or email her at: [Stephanie@mountainpark.org](mailto:Stephanie@mountainpark.org).

### Foster Care Support Highlights

- Daily Reimbursement Rate for Families Increased by 63% for younger children and 53% for older children!
- The processing time on a new foster home application was reduced by 29%!
- The number of foster homes has increased by 18%!
- The improved website is getting 15 to 20 hits per week from those interested in becoming foster parents!

## Report Highlights 2004 Reform Successes

Two years ago, Governor Janet Napolitano challenged stakeholders from throughout the state's child welfare system to work together to identify and implement strategies to improve the lives of Arizona's abused and neglected children.

The result was the *Governor's Plan for Child Protective Services Reform* and a special Legislative session during which elected leaders approved funding and passed legislation to support critical reform efforts.

Since then, hundreds of consumers, staff members, advocates, treatment and service providers, law enforcement representatives and community leaders have worked to implement those strategies and have made a great deal of progress in improving CPS. In January 2005, the Department of Economic Security's Division of Children, Youth and Families issued a 7-page report highlighting the changes made during 2004 in six major areas:

- Creation of a multi-disciplinary response to reports of abuse and neglect;
- Development of a statewide prevention system;
- Clarification of the mission and role of CPS;
- Delivery of timely, effective services to children and families;

- Providing adequate support for children and families served by the system, as well as those who provide the services; and,
- Increased community involvement in the child welfare system.

Fifty separate steps taken to reform CPS are detailed in this report; all of these were achieved in just one year!

Mary Lou Quintana-Hanley, DES Deputy Director for Children, Youth and Families, called the report "astounding."

"I think we were all aware of how hard people were working and that they were getting a lot done," Quintana-Hanley said, "But, when you see it all put together like that, it is extremely rewarding."

A great deal of work remains, she cautioned.

"This document is wonderful; it reminds us that we are making progress and that our efforts have a real impact in children's lives," Quintana-Hanley said. "We can't sit back on our laurels. We need to use this information to motivate and inspire ourselves to continue working to improve our efforts to protect children and to strengthen their families."

A copy of the complete report is available on the Governor's website at [www.governor.state.az.us/cps](http://www.governor.state.az.us/cps).

## Guidelines for Identifying Substance-Exposed Newborns Released

There is growing concern for the care and safety of substance-exposed newborns in Arizona. Early intervention services for both the newborn and the mother are critical in minimizing the effects of prenatal substance exposure.

Besides the direct toxic effects of the drugs to the newborn, continued substance abuse by the mother increases the risk for child abuse and neglect. Indeed, reports of child abuse and neglect have increased dramatically over the past decade and are correlated with an increase in drug use among primary caregivers.

The societal impact related to prenatal substance abuse profoundly affects many facets of our communities. Successful identification and intervention may result in substantial cost savings in health care, foster care, special education and incarceration.

Under the direction of Governor Napolitano, Arizona physicians with expertise in prenatal substance abuse, Child Protective Services, Arizona Department of Health Services, Indian Health Services, and hospital social services came together to develop a consistent

approach to identifying substance-exposed newborns.

Based on extensive medical literature review, review of other state guidelines, and input from hospital newborn programs, this committee drafted *Guidelines for Identifying Substance-Exposed Newborns*.

The document — which was reviewed and commented upon by the Arizona chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Arizona Medical Association's Maternal Child Health Committee, the Arizona Perinatal Trust, and the Arizona chapter of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists — also includes guiding principles for physicians to use when weighing the ethical considerations involved in identifying substance exposed newborns.

In February, the guidelines were mailed to obstetric, pediatric and neonatology departments at Arizona hospitals so that health care professionals and institutions may consider incorporating the guidelines in their policies and procedures for nursing, social services and medical staff. The guidelines are available on the Governor's website at [www.governor.state.az.us/cps](http://www.governor.state.az.us/cps).

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## JURY TRIAL UPDATE

Since December 2003, there have been a total of 21 jury trials in severance cases in Arizona – 6 in Maricopa County, 12 in Pima County, 1 in Yuma County, and 2 in Mohave County. In 19 of the 21 cases, the juries terminated parental rights. This action frees the child for adoption to a safe, permanent home. In cases where verdicts do not favor severing parental rights, the department will continue to work with the family with the goal of returning the child to the home when it is safe to do so. The child is not eligible to be adopted or placed in a permanent home unless additional grounds for severance arise and/or until further efforts to reunify the family fail and severance is eventually granted. There are 40 cases pending statewide in which parents have requested jury trials for severance hearings. Children's Action Alliance has conducted a study of the jury trial process; the study will be released in the coming months.

## Youth Voices Heard as Critical Part of Reform Efforts

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searches. Child protection and employment staff are exploring partnerships and funding sources to expand this service to other youth in care throughout the state.

Youth are critical members of the subcommittee working to expand mentoring opportunities for foster youth. At a summer conference, youth from throughout the state had an opportunity to share their views on what a quality mentoring program would include. They were particularly complimentary of a program in Pima County, In My Shoes, which has former foster youth who mentor children currently in care. The subcommittee is working on a plan to expand the successful In My Shoes program to other areas of the state.

In addition to listening and responding to the concerns and needs of youth, the Division is working to better meet their needs by more closely collaborating

with sister agencies who serve them.

In December, DCYF staff began meeting with colleagues from the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Arizona Department of Health Services, and the Children's Medical and Dental Program to begin creating interagency protocols to address issues like:

- Transition planning for youth aging out of the system, or moving between jurisdictions or placements;
- Continuity and consistency in case planning, including identification of guardians and assessments that may be used by multiple systems; and,
- Information sharing, including improvements to technology.

The goal for completion of these protocols is July 2005.